

"MDOT Up Close" is a fairly new feature of MDOT Today. This series will take a close-up look at the many different areas that make up the department, focusing on what is unique to that MDOT work environment. The fourth article of this series focuses on the Bureau of Aeronautics.

Aeronautics Up Close

Who We Are and What We Do

Besides wanting our flights to depart and arrive on time, most of us probably give little thought to aviation. But consider this: Build a mile of roadway and you can go a mile; build a mile of runway and you can go anywhere!

"Constructing runways is just one of the many ways we keep Michigan's skyways and runways running safely and smoothly," said Deputy Director Bill Gehman, who oversees a team of 55 dedicated "advocates for aviation."

The Bureau of Aeronautics is comprised of two divisions: Airports and Aviation Services. The Airports Division administers the state airport development program, providing project management for the programming, planning, design, safety evaluation and construction of airports throughout Michigan.

"With more and more private companies relying on general aviation, local communities need an effective airport

infrastructure to be competitive," said Ollie House, airports division administrator.

Besides shepherding airport improvements, the Airports Division licenses and/or registers airports, flight schools, aircraft, and aircraft dealers. "We're the Secretary of State for aviation," said Safety and Services Manager Tom Krashen, whose crew inspects each of the 243 public-use airports in the state annually. There are 114 flight schools, 190 aircraft dealers and 6,900 registered aircraft in Michigan.

The Airports Division also updates and publishes the Michigan Aeronautical Chart and Michigan Airport Directory, mailed to Michigan's 18,000 pilots and aircraft owners. The chart shows pilots where they can and cannot fly – and the directory provides important runway and contact information on each airport in the state.



Randy Collier (left), Ken Schaschl and Mary Kay Trierweiler display copies of the Aeronautics safety publications they edit - the Aeronautical Chart, Aviation News and the Airport Directory - which pilots rely on for critical flight and airport information.

Conference held each May in Lansing helps educators incorporate aviation concepts into daily classroom activities.

"Aviation careers are sparked at an early age," Krashen said. "Our purpose is to keep students interested in school as well as develop a crop of future aviation enthusiasts."

Helping communities attract and retain quality airline services is the work of Aero's other division, Aviation Services. "Everyone wants the convenience of flying from nearby, but airlines aren't easily persuaded to initiate or expand flights," said Pauline Misjak, division administrator. "It really depends on profitability and convincing them that the best use of their aircraft is in Michigan."

Another Aviation Services Division responsibility is enhancing weather-related aviation safety. Computerized weather briefing systems at 46 airports provide near real-time weather radar images. Thirty state-owned Automated Weather Observing Stations (AWOS) scattered across Michigan provide continuous weather information via radio, telephone and the Internet.

The division also is in charge of the airplanes used for transporting state personnel on official business. MDOT operates aircraft for on-demand,



Aero's Jay Henning (left) and Tom Ferrigan install an Automated Weather Observing Station that gathers local weather data for pilots and weather reporting services like weatherunderground.com on the MDOT Interchange.

The division's emphasis on pilot safety and education is behind the very successful Great Lakes International Aviation Conference. The conference, which debuted in 2001, brings airplane mechanics, pilots, students and other enthusiasts together to discuss the latest in aviation safety and technology.

Other division activities include aviation education for teachers and students. A well-attended Aviation/Aerospace Teachers



cost-effective air travel to destinations within and outside Michigan.

"Travel by car can be very time-consuming," said Gerry Edwards, division manager. "With the convenience and cost-effectiveness of our state planes, a group of employees can do in one day what would otherwise require two overnights, meals, and wear and tear on state vehicles."

Challenges

Preserving the state's airport system is a formidable challenge facing Aeronautics, says Jim Downer, program coordinator. Michigan's general aviation infrastructure is at risk of being plowed under by residential, industrial and commercial development. Southeastern Michigan has lost 20 airports in the past 20 years and statewide the problem is fourfold. Downer says a lack of understanding is the problem.

"Virtually everyone is a direct user of roads, but fewer people realize their lives depend indirectly on public-use airports," Downer said, adding that next-day delivery of parcels, products and produce is considered normal business, thanks to aviation. "While most of us see the economic value of highways, our job is to champion the economic benefits of airports, which contribute more than \$10 billion to our state's economy each year."

It's Been a Great Flight for Bill Gehman

Like many others who are taking the "early out," Bill Gehman has mixed feelings about retiring from his position as deputy director of the Aeronautics Bureau.

"We are at an exciting threshold in general aviation," said Gehman, who has led the bureau for 17 of his 28 years with the department. "Exciting new materials and designs in the next few years will make airplanes much more affordable to buy and maintain."

Gehman, whose love for aviation took off at the age of 12 when his father first let him take the controls of their family airplane, earned an aviation engineering degree from Western Michigan University and served as a private-sector consultant and Federal Aviation Administration engineer before joining MDOT in 1974. He was promoted to the top bureau spot in 1985 and, just four years later, received the President's National Award from AASHTO for his innovative programs to improve air service. "It's been a team effort," said Gehman, who is quick to share any accolades with those who have made the bureau one of the finest in the country. "I've had a great flight with a wonderful crew."

Gehman, who also received the Airline Transport Association's Award of Excellence in 1992, is optimistic about the future of commercial air service. "For decades, traveling by air was out of reach for most people," he said. "Today, airliners are the buses of the sky, and their use will only continue to grow as everyone's time becomes even more valuable."



Bill Gehman

Some of the many accomplishments under Bill's leadership include:

- ✈ Advanced MDOT's Airport Development Program for funding capital projects at the state's public-use airports from \$40 million to more than \$120 million annually.
- ✈ Developed a nationally recognized Air Service program to assist out-state air carrier airports in obtaining and retaining quality air service.
- ✈ Created one of the most aggressive General Aviation airport preservation programs in the country.
- ✈ Established an All Weather Airport Access Program for general aviation airports to improve flight safety.
- ✈ Designed and built the nation's first mobile aircraft fire-fighting training unit to substantially reduce the cost for federally mandated training for airport firefighters.
- ✈ Championed legislation that improves an airport's ability to protect against incompatible land use infringement around airports.
- ✈ Established an Aviation Systems Plan for identifying airports that can best respond to state goals and objectives, aligned with the MDOT state long-range plan, and guiding airport development funding decisions.
- ✈ Signed an agreement with Northwest Airlines supporting the development of a new \$1.2 billion midfield terminal and new runway to enhance operational efficiency at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. 📍

Aeronautics At Your Service

- Aeronautical Chart - Randy Collier
- Aircraft Registration, Chart and Directory Sales, Dealer Licenses - Susan Keldsen
- Airport Improvements - Dave Baker
- Airport Inspections - Randy Collier
- Airport Directory - Mary Kay Trierweiler
- Airports Division Administrator - Ollie House
- Air Transport Scheduling - Penny Garnet
- Aviation Services Division Administrator - Pauline Misjak
- AWOS (Air Weather Observation System) - Steve Schultz
- Great Lakes International Aviation Conference - Phil Tartalone
- Michigan Aviation Magazine Editor - Ken Schaschl
- New Airports, Hospital Heliports, Instrument Approach Development - Juan Zapata
- Safety and Services - Tom Krashen